

Finds on a
Roman Site at Caister-on-Sea, Norfolk.

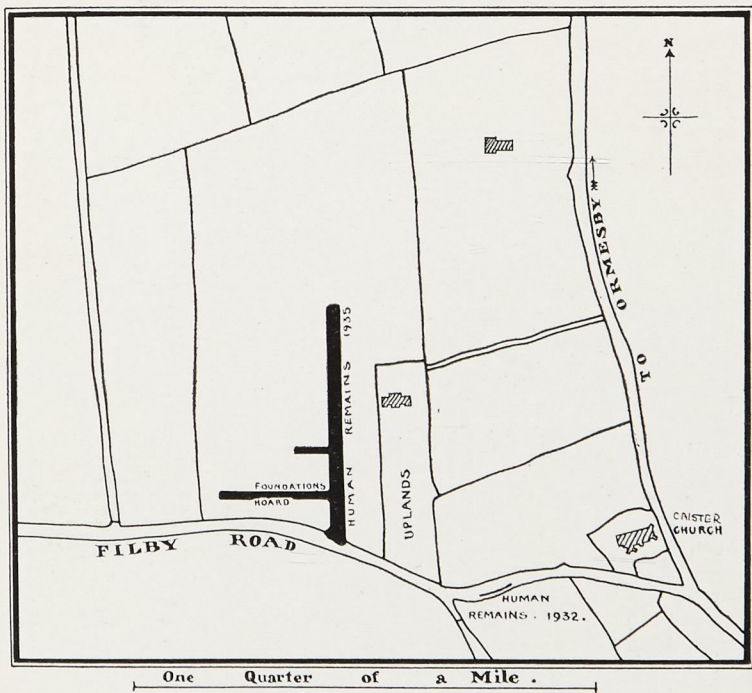
BY

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Preparations for building operations at the Sun Vale Estate on the north side of the Filby road at Caister-on-Sea have provided an opportunity for gleaning some information concerning the Roman occupation of this district. Unfortunately, no arrangements could be made for a systematic investigation, and the following has been compiled from the necessarily casual notes of a few local antiquaries.

Nothing very definite was learned concerning the plan of the buildings. They had masonry footings, tiled roofs, and at least two of the floors were of *opus signinum*. The ashes found with the broken tiles suggested destruction by fire, and corroboration of this is provided by the potsherds, many of which had been heated to redness after having been broken.

The bricks, several of which are marked by dog-paws, are $13\frac{1}{4}$ ins. by $9\frac{1}{4}$ ins. by $1\frac{1}{4}$ ins. in size. Unlike the Burgh Castle bricks, those at Caister-on-Sea are uniform in size and of good shape. No stamp or other identification-mark of the makers has yet been found. Roof tile-pieces are very numerous—the *imbrices* being better made than the *tegulae*. The

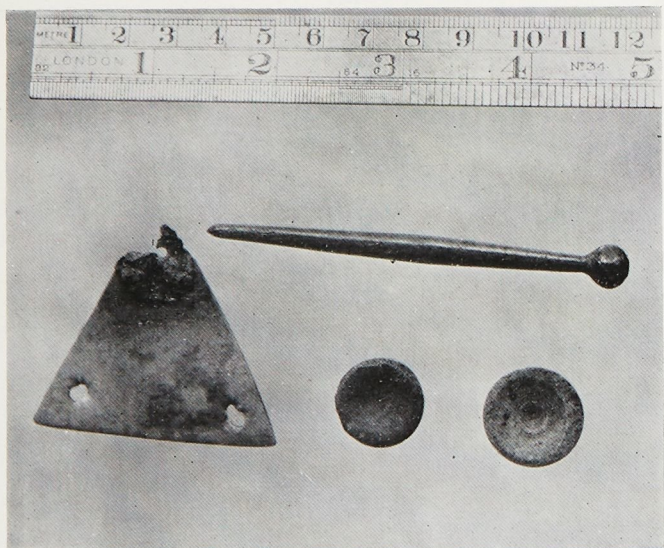


ROMAN SITE AT CAISTER-ON-SEA.

General layout of surroundings from $\frac{1}{2500}$ O.S. Map. Details (in black, the area dug into) from measurements made on site, February, 1936.



Mortaria fragments.



Bone Pin, Discs, and Triangular Tool with repair.

length of the *imbrices* is unknown, but the width at the top is $4\frac{1}{4}$ ins., and at the bottom, 6 ins. The *tegulae* measure $14\frac{1}{4}$ ins. by $11\frac{1}{4}$ ins. The flue tiles are of several patterns. The commonest form measures 8 ins. by $7\frac{1}{2}$ ins., with a 2-in. flange and hole at the centre.

The pottery of the Caister site differs slightly from that of Burgh Castle in that it covers a greater range of time; and the late forms of the so-called Samian ware are well represented.

From time to time, this site is visited by archaeologists for the purpose of collecting and examining such objects of antiquarian interest as are unearthed by the workmen. The fragments of *mortaria* are easily recognised, and are therefore picked out first. A good series of these has been formed, which consists mainly of red ware with quartz-grain linings, thick and heavy pink, cream, or white ware with pottery-chip linings, and some rough grey with shingle linings.

After the *mortaria* comes the whole series of decorated and plain red wares of the better quality. These may be classed as red-glaze—the glaze being not within the modern potter's meaning of the term, but rather an egg-shell finish.

Of the fine-quality ware, several pieces of a crater-shaped decorated bowl and of rims and bases of keeled plain bowls have been found. One base bore the potter's stamp MARTI inside the vessel; another included a few letters; while yet another bore a complete impression, which unfortunately was blank—possibly the stamp was impressed on its side.

The fragments of the colour-coated, or *engobed ware*, are very mixed in character. The neck of a red, single-handled flagon is interesting, for the small neck, being constricted below, was evidently found troublesome in the process of filling and emptying. To overcome this difficulty, a small hole was drilled near the handle. The ware of this piece is very porous, and the coating easily washes off; but probably, when new, it was treated with wax or

rendered impervious by some other means. *Castor* vases, of which many pieces have been found, are very fragile and stand upon characteristically inadequate bases. Two of them are sufficiently entire to indicate their complete shape. The relief decoration of one piece bears the head of an animal, probably a dog. Another bears the representation of a human nose of natural size, the remainder of the face being lost.

The remaining potsherds consist of coarse grey ware. Many years ago, a kiln in which this ware was burned was discovered within a few hundred yards of our site. The pots, being made locally, were probably inexpensive, for no repaired examples have yet been noted. Hundreds of pieces of the common rolled-out rims, a long series of basins with splayed sides, and some shallow dishes with bottoms rubbed smooth and surfaces coated a dull black, have been unearthed; and sufficient pieces were found of a three-handled pot 9 ins. high and 8 ins. in diameter, with a human mask on its shoulder, to enable its reconstruction.

No information can be gathered from the few small scraps of glass brought to the surface.

Of the miscellaneous items, a rake-like tool of deer-horn was discovered, together with a large fragment of horn attached to part of the animal's skull. The points of the large piece had all been partly sawn through and broken off. Two bone pins (one with a round knob and the other with a flat spoon-like head) and several bone discs were found. An interesting bone item is a thin triangular plate, of two inches side, pierced with a hole near each angle. This is much worn and had been repaired with a bronze plate. Such a device was probably used in spinning a three-strand cord.

The bronze finds are badly corroded. A cloak fastener or *fibula*, two hair-pins and a puzzling canoe-shaped object (vaguely described by some as an *amulet*), are among the most noteworthy.

Much speculation has been occasioned by the numerous human remains found on and near the Caister site; but no advance has been made on the



Looking eastward along the first trench dug. April, 1935.



Three-handled Pot in grey ware with mask on shoulder.



Cranium. Front view.



Cranium. Side view.

somewhat indefinite theories propounded by Clowes, Dawson Turner and other antiquaries.

In view of the considerable digging operations which have been carried out in the past on the eastern portion of the site, some difficulty was experienced in determining which, if any, of the human remains were undisturbed. Near the Filby road, the bodies had been buried at a level about six feet below the present land surface; but as the work proceeded northwards up the hill, the bone-level became increasingly shallow—so much so that, about two hundred yards from the road, it was disturbed by the plough.

The centre of the new road (which takes a N.-S. direction) appears to mark the western boundary of the interment area, which is known to extend southward across the Filby road. In 1932, sewerage work afforded the opportunity for examining one of the many undisturbed places of interment then found on the south side of the road, about two hundred yards from our site. The bodies had been buried in graves dug into the surface of the white pre-glacial sand which had been covered by three feet of discoloured sand and four feet of repeated road make-up.

The bodies were fully extended, face up, and with feet to the east, the distance between them being about the same as that between the graves in the churchyard near by. No metal or other objects were found associated with the bones, and no Roman pottery was found in the infilling of the graves below the road.

Part of one of the skulls from our site was submitted to Dr. A. J. E. Cave of the Royal College of Surgeons. He reports: "The skull of a young woman of about thirty years of age—certainly not more than thirty-five. It exhibits considerable post-mortem weathering, probably due to water action, but has escaped any marked distortion. The *basis cranii* and the facial parts are entirely lacking, leaving only the *calvaria*. This is long and narrow (193 mm. by 142 mm.), shows female characteristics, and in racial type conforms to the Ancient British form. The low forehead, moderately developed brow ridges, the

occipital bossing, and the general configuration of the vault, are all features which characterise the Ancient British skull from Neolithic times onwards. The present specimen may be as late as the Roman period, though I am inclined to doubt this. In the absence of reliable archæological evidence, the dating of skulls is notoriously untrustworthy; but I think you may safely accept this specimen as Ancient British, and probably pre-Roman."

Some of those familiar with the site and the objects found on it, have expressed the opinion that the interments were post-Roman. The only certain point is that the interments were made before the old Norwich Way (now called the Filby road) came into existence.

Many coins from the site have been reported, but the circumstances of their finding were so uncertain that only nine (one of them an Allectus) were worth noting. In the early part of 1936, a small hoard was found, and, fortunately, it was possible to collect the greater part for description. The coins were sent to the British Museum, and Miss A. S. Robertson reported on them in the *Numismatic Chronicle*.¹

[*The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 26, pt. 2 (1936), pp. 251-3, contains a brief note on the Caister-on-Sea Roman site based on information by the same author, with an illustration of a brooch, pendant and handle, all of bronze.]

¹ *Numismatic Chronicle*, Sec. 5, pt. 2, No. 62, 1936. "A find of Constantinian coins from Caister by Yarmouth."